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Unanimous vote confirms Perry as new defense chief

By Bill Gertz
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

The Senate voted unanimously last night to confirm William J. Perry as secretary of defense, replacing outgoing Pentagon chief Les Aspin.

In a 97-0 vote, the Senate ended an embarrassing effort by President Clinton to replace Mr. Aspin, who was forced to resign in December over budget disputes and for failing to send armor in support of U.S. troops in Somalia.

Mr. Perry was sworn in as the 19th defense secretary at an informal ceremony last night at the Pentagon. His wife, Lee, Mr. Aspin and Army Gen. John Shalikashvili, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, were present.

Retired Adm. Bobby Ray Inman withdrew as the nominee for the post on Jan. 18, claiming in a nationally televised news conference that Republicans and newspaper columnists conspired to smear his reputation.

Mr. Perry's official duties begin this weekend when he travels to Munich to take part in an annual international security policy conference attended by senior government officials.

On Tuesday, he is scheduled to testify before Congress about the Pentagon's fiscal 1995 defense budget, which will be released Monday.

Senate Armed Services Committee Chairman Sam Nunn, in remarks on the Senate floor, praised Mr. Perry, 66, as an expert in national security issues who "has shown high standards of personal conduct and integrity."

"The record clearly shows that Bill Perry is highly qualified to be secretary of defense," Mr. Nunn said.

Sen. Strom Thurmond, South Carolina Republican and ranking minority member of the Armed Services Committee, said Mr. Perry, a weapons procurement official in the

Carter administration, was in the forefront of modernizing U.S. forces.

Mr. Perry is known as the key developer of radar-evading stealth technology.

"I hope Dr. Perry's appointment to the position of secretary will begin a new era of consultation and cooperation between the Department of Defense and the White House," Mr. Thurmond said. "Over the past several months I have been concerned about the lack of focus and support President Clinton has given his national security team and the defense issues."

The Senate has confirmed Mr. Perry three times before for lesser positions in the Pentagon, twice during the Carter administration and last year for the deputy defense secretary post.

Absent from the vote yesterday were Republican Sens. John McCain of Arizona, Don Nickles of Oklahoma and Ted Stevens of Alaska.

Mr. Perry told the Senate Armed Services Committee on Wednesday that he has a very different personality than Mr. Aspin but that his views on key defense issues are very similar.

The new defense secretary said at his nomination hearing that he is very worried about heightened tensions on the Korean peninsula and will use a "carrot and stick" to keep North Korea from developing nuclear weapons.

He said he proposed and approved a joint U.S.-China defense conversion commission that will be co-directed by himself and Lt. Gen. Ding Henggao, Beijing's top international arms dealer.

He also said he must deal with a \$20 billion shortfall in defense funds needed in the next six years to pay for programs designed to keep U.S. forces capable of fighting two regional conflicts at nearly the same time.

One of his top priorities will be to assure that U.S. military field commanders get the support they need and to prevent budget cuts from producing "hollow" military forces in the coming years.

LOS ANGELES TIMES

Feb. 4, 1994

Perry Is Sworn In as Defense Secretary

■ **Military:** Aspin's deputy takes oath same day Senate votes, 97 to 0, to back nomination. Confirmation caps almost two-month search for a replacement.

By ART PINE
TIMES STAFF WRITER

WASHINGTON—William J. Perry was sworn in Thursday as President Clinton's new secretary of defense, ending a 7½-weeklong effort by the Administration to replace departing Secretary Les Aspin.

The 66-year-old former Stanford University engineering professor took the oath of office in a private ceremony at the Pentagon after the Senate voted, 97 to 0, to confirm his nomination. Earlier, the Senate Armed Services Committee had endorsed the appointment unanimously.

The vote Thursday followed a 3½-hour hearing before the Armed Services panel on Wednesday during which Perry, who has served as Aspin's deputy for 11 months, won unabashed plaudits from senators for his stand on national security issues.

The new defense chief faces a spate of challenges and problems in guiding the military Establishment through its post-Cold War cutbacks. One of his first assignments will be to present the Administration's new defense budget to Congress next week.

The confirmation was rushed through at the request of the Administration, in part, so Perry could attend an international conference of defense ministers in

Munich this weekend.

Perry is expected to leave late today and return to Washington Sunday evening.

A high-technology expert who has become known as the godfather of the radar-evading Stealth bomber, Perry has spent the bulk of his career in the defense industry, as a consultant on super-secret weapons projects.

But he is expected to move easily into broader defense issues, from ensuring military preparedness to developing a national strategy for U.S. intervention in situations such as those in Somalia and Bosnia.

Clinton initially nominated retired Navy Adm. Bobby Ray Inman, a Texas businessman, to replace Aspin, who resigned under White House pressure.

The President was embarrassed politically when the admiral backed out of the nomination, saying that he did not want to face criticism from Congress and the media.

After a week of consultations, the White House eventually asked Perry to take the job, and announced his nomination formally on Jan. 24. Perry served in the Pentagon during the late 1970s as undersecretary of defense for research and engineering.

He is expected to go along with policies hammered out by Aspin on such issues as the size of the armed forces, homosexuals in the military and women in combat and to leave most key staff positions virtually unchanged.

But colleagues said that they expect him to be more decisive and articulate than his predecessor and better at managing the Pentagon.

They also predicted that he will abandon Aspin's efforts to thrust the Defense Department into the heart of the Administration's foreign policy-making apparatus.

Aspin, who had agreed to remain in the post until his successor was sworn in, had come under criticism from opponents of the Administration's policies, and took the blame for a failed U.S. raid in Somalia on Oct. 3 that resulted in the deaths of 18 servicemen.

Aspin earlier had refused a request to send more tanks to support U.S. troops in the troubled African nation.

But the 55-year-old former Wisconsin congressman has been praised in recent days for having shepherded the Pentagon through such controversies as the gays-in-the-military issue and for initiating the "bottom-up review," a sweeping overhaul of basic defense policy.